

SONGS OF THE PRAIRIE



ROBERT J. C. STEAD



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SONGS OF THE PRAIRIE

BY

ROBERT J. C. STEAD

Author of "PRAIRIE BORN."

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Songs of the Prairie

THE PRAIRIE

THE City? Oh, yes, the City
Is a good enough place for a while,
It fawns on the clever and witty,
And welcomes the rich with a smile;
It lavishes money as water,
It boasts of its palace and hall,
But the City is only the daughter—
The Prairie is mother of all!

The City is all artificial,
Its life is a fashion-made fraud,
Its wisdom, though learned and judicial,
Is far from the wisdom of God;
Its hope is the hope of ambition,
Its lust is the lust to acquire,
And the larger it grows, its condition
Sinks lower in pestilent mire.

The City is cramped and congested,
The haunt and the covert of crime;
The Prairie is broad, unmolested,
It points to the high and sublime;

Songs of the Prairie

Where only the sky is above you
And only the distance in view,
With no one to jostle or shove you—
It's there a man learns to be true!

Where the breeze whispers over the willows
Or sighs in the dew laden grass,
And the rain clouds, like big, stormy billows,
Besprinkle the land as they pass;
With the smudge-fire alight in the distance,
The wild duck alert on the stream,
Where life is a psalm of existence
And opulence only a dream.

Where wide as the plan of creation
The Prairies stretch ever away,
And beckon a broad invitation
To fly to their bosom, and stay;
The prairie fire smell in the gloaming—
The water-wet wind in the spring—
An empire untrod for the roaming—
Ah, this is a life for a king!

When peaceful and pure as a river
They lie in the light of the moon,
You know that the Infinite Giver
Is stringing your spirit a-tune;

Songs of the Prairie

That life is not told in the telling,
That death does not whisper adieu,
And deep in your bosom up-welling,
You know that the Promise is true!

To those who have seen it and smelt it,
To those who have loved it alone
To those who have known it and felt it—
The Prairie is ever their own;
And far though they wander, unwary,
Far, far from the breath of the plain,
A thought of the wind on the Prairie
Will set their blood rushing again.

Then you to the City who want it,
Go, grovel its gain-glutted streets,
Be one of the ciphers that haunt it,
Or sit in its opulent seats;
But for me, where the Prairies are reaching
As far as the vision can scan—
Ah, that is the prayer and the preaching
That goes to the heart of a man!

Songs of the Prairie

THE GRAMOPHONE

Where the lonely settler's shanty dots the plain,
And he sighs for friends and comradeship in
vain,

Through the silences intense
Comes a sound of eloquence

Shrilling forth in steely, brazen, waxen strain—

The deep, resonant voice of Gladstone
calling from the tomb,

Or Ingersoll's deliverance before his
brother's bier ;

Then a saucy someone singing, "When the
daisies are in bloom,"

And the fife and drummers rendering
"The British Grenadier."

Back as far into the hills as they could get,
They've a roof that turns the winter and the wet,

They are grizzled but they're gay,

They've a daily matinee,

They are happy though they're head and ears
in debt—

Songs of the Prairie

"I wish I had my old girl back again,"

"If the wind had only blown the other
way,"

Uncertain voices join an old refrain

And repeat the same performance every
day.

There's a Scotchman holding down a mining
claim

All unknown to Fortune, Influence or Fame,

But a few of Harry's songs

Are a solace for his wrongs

And he sings them ev'ry evening in his "hame"—

"I'm courtin' Bonnie Leezy Lindsay noo,"

"When I get back again"—you know
the lilt—

"We parted on the shore," "I'm fou',
I'm fou',"

"And that's the reason noo I wear the
kilt."

There's a son of Erin in Saskatchewan,

He's at work a half an hour before the dawn,

But before he goes to bunk

He makes a table of his trunk

And he sets his clock-work concert thereupon—

Songs of the Prairie

"The harp that once through Tara's halls,"
"St. Patrick's day in the mornin',"
"The last rose of summer," and Fancy
recalls
A glimpse of his "Kathleen Mavour-
neen."

There's an Englishman who's living in a shack,
He's a victim of the gramophone attack,
With a half-a-dozen kids
(He has half that many "quids")
But he dances with the youngest on his back—
Though he's living in the country of the
Cree
The horn that hangs a fathom from his
head
Stretches out a thousand leagues across
the sea
And sings in dear old London town
instead.

They are far from auditorium or hall,
But their minds are still atune to Music's call,
They can hear Caruso sing,
Or the bells of Shandon ring,
As they smoke and count the cracks along the
wall.

Songs of the Prairie

.
*I'm a miracle of eloquence imprisoned in the wax,
I'm a mental inspiration operated by a spring,
I'm a nightly consolation from Yukon to Halifax,
And the ends of all creation sit and listen
while I sing:*

*I'm the Voice of all that man has sought
and gained;*

*I'm the throb of ev'ry heart that ever
pained;*

I'm the Genesis of Fate,

I'm the Soul of Love and Hate,

I'm the humanly impossible attained!

Songs of the Prairie

THE PLOW

WHAT power is this that stands behind the
steel?—

A homely implement of blade and wheel—
Neglected by the margin of the way,
And flashing back the blaze of dying day;
Or dragging slow across the yellow field
In silent prophecy of lavish yield,
It marks the pace of innocence and toil,
And taps the boundless treasure of the soil.

Before you came the red man rode the plain
Untitled lord of Nature's great domain;
The shaggy herds, knee deep in mellow grass;
The lazy summer hours were wont to pass;
The wild goose nested by the water side;
The red deer roamed upon the prairie wide;
The black bear trod the woods in solemn might
The lynx stole through the bushes in the night

No sound of toil was heard in all the land;
No joyous laugh of voice or sharp command

Songs of the Prairie

No cloud of smoke from iron funnels thrown
Was through the autumn hazes gently blown;
No edge of steel tore up the virgin sod;
No church its shining finger turned to God;
No tradesman labored over bench and tool;
No children chattered on their way to school.

But all the land lay desolate and bare,
Its wealth of plain its forest riches rare
Ungessed by those who saw it through their
tears,

And Nature—miser of a thousand years—
Was adding still to her immense reserve
That shall supply the world with brawn and
nerve:

But all lay silent, useless, and unused,
And useless 'twas because it was unused.

You came. Straightway the silent plain
Grew mellow with the glow of golden grain;
The axes in the solitary wood
Rang out where stately oak and maple stood;
The land became alive with busy din,
And as the many settled, more came in;
The world looked on in wonder and dismay—
The building of a nation in a day!

Songs of the Prairie

By lake and river, rock and barren waste,
A peaceful army toiled in eager haste;
Ten thousand workers sweating in the sun
Pressed on the task so recently begun;
Their outworks every day were forced ahead—
And every day they gave their toll of dead—
Until at length the double lines of steel
Received the steaming steed and whirling wheel!

Where yesterday the lazy bison lay
A city glitters in the sun to-day;
His paths are turned to streets of wood and
stone,
And thousands tread the way he trod alone;
The mighty hum of industry and trade
Fills all the place where once he held parade,
And far away the unheard river's play
Makes joyous night still brighter than the day!

Upon the plains a thousand towns arise,
And quickly each to be a city tries;
The sound of trade is heard on every hand
And sturdy men rise to possess the land;
Awhile they lingered, thinking it a dream,
But now they flow in a resistless stream
That seems to fill the prairie far and near,
Yet in its vastness soon they disappear.

Songs of the Prairie

Where once the silent red man spurned the
ground

A land of peace and plenty now is found,
A land by Nature destined to be great,
Where every man is lord of his estate;
Where men may dwell together in accord,
And honest toil receive its due reward;
Where loyal friends and happy homes are made,
And culture follows hard the feet of trade.

This you have made it. Is it vain to hope
The sons of such a land will climb and grope
Along the undiscovered ways of life,
And neither seek nor be found shunning strife,
But ever, beckoned by a high ideal,
Press onward, upward, till they make it real;
With feet sure planted on their native sod,
And will and aspirations linked with God?

Songs of the Prairie

THE MOTHERING

I had lain untrod for a million years from the
line to the Arctic sea;
I had dreamed strange dreams of the vast un-
known,
Of the lispig wind and the dancing zone
Where the Northland fairies' feet had flown,
And it all seemed good to me.

At the close of a thousand eons of sleep came
a pang that was strange to me;
The pang of a new life in my breast,
The swell of a vast and a vague unrest,
And it thrilled my soul from East to West
As it fluttered to be free.

But I steeled my heart to the biped thing; of
vast presumption he:
He would lure my lonely thoughts away,
He would sport himself on the sacred clay
Where the dust of the prehistoric lay;
But he scorned the soul of me.

Songs of the Prairie

So I stretched my plains for a thousand leagues
from the mountains to the sea;
But he rolled them back with a steel-laid line,
And he crumbled space by man's design
And he filled his life with the breath of mine;
But his love he gave not me.

Then I called him foes from the farthest north
and the snowflake fluttered free;
But he took him trees I had given birth,
And he delved him coal from my bowels of earth,
And he laughed at me as he sat in mirth;
But he cursed the cold of me.

Then I cut him off from his fellow-men that his
thought might turn to me;
But he strung him a line of copper thread,
And his fire-shod words swung overhead,
By the fiend of air his thought was spread
O'er hill, and plain, and lea.

Then I gave him hopes he could not define and
fears that he could not flee;
And he heard my cry in the long, still night,
In my spirit-thrall I held him tight
And his blind soul-eyes craved for the light;
But the light he could not see.

Songs of the Prairie

So I held my peace till I saw him sit with children at his knee ;

And I sent them the sun, the wind and the rain,
And the ferny slope and the flowery plain,
And the wet night-smell of the growing grain ;
And their love they gave to me.

In the last race-birth of the sons of men a travail holdeth me ;

But out of the night of pain and tears
A new life comes with the rolling years ;
And I fondle the child of my hope and fears,
And it seemeth good to me.

Songs of the Prairie

HUSTLIN' IN MY JEANS

YES, I'm holdin' down the homestead here an'
roughin' it a bit,
It seems the only kind o' life that I was built
to fit,
For it's thirty years last summer since I staked
my first preserve,
An' I reckon on the whole I've prospered more
than I deserve;
An' my friends kep' naggin' at me for to quit
this toil an' strife
An to settle in the city for the balance of my
life,
An' I ain't compelled to labor—I've cached a
wad of beans—
But I'm happier when I'm hustlin' on the home-
stead in my jeans.

I've tried to loaf an' like it an' I've tried to swell
about
Where the boozey run to red-eye an' the greedy
run to gout,

Songs of the Prairie

An' I've tried to wear a collar an' a fancy fly-
net vest,
An' I've tried to think it pleasant just to sit
around an' rest;
An' I've mingled with the nabobs an' hee-hawed
with other guys
That were just as sick as I was of a life of livin'
lies;
I've mingled in society an' peeked behind the
scenes—
An' I'm happier when I'm hustlin' on the home-
stead in my jeans.

Then I got the lust for roamin' an I rummaged
round the earth,
An' I got a big experience an' correspondin'
girth,
But the more I roved an' rambled the less I cared
to live,
An' I only kep' on goin' cause I'd no alternative;
I learned through tips an' tickets an' the jostle
of the cars
That I wouldn't trade a homestead for a conti-
nent in Mars;

Songs of the Prairie

An' I bid good-bye to Fashion an' her social
kings an' queens,
An' I filed my second homestead an' I bought
a pair of jeans.

'Course it's sometimes kind o' lonely on the
prairie here alone,
When the night-time settles round you an' your
thoughts are all your own,
An' old faces flit before you like a flock o' homin'
birds
An' your heart swells with emotion that no man
can put in words,
An' you ponder on the Why-for, the Beginnin',
an' the End;
An' you know the only things worth while are
Family an' Friend—
From the trifles of existence your better judg-
ment weans,
An' you get the right perspective on the home-
stead—in your jeans.

There are days the sweat-drops glisten on this
sun-burned hand of mine,
There are nights the joints go creakin' as I crawl
to bed, at nine,

Songs of the Prairie

But I hear the horses' stampin' and the rap of
Collie's tail

An' it minds me of the Eighties an' the Old Com-
mission Trail—

Of the days we pledged our future to a land we
hardly knew,

An' the men whose brave beginnings made pros-
perity for you;

There are men now worth their millions I re-
member in their teens,

An' they made their start by hustlin' on the home-
stead in their jeans.

There are times when most folks figure that their
life has been a blank;

You may be a homeless hobo or director of a
bank,

But the thought will catch you nappin'—catch
you sometime unawares—

That your life has been a failure, and that no
one really cares;

That the world will roll without you till the
Resurrection morn,

An' that no one would have missed you if you
never had been born;

Songs of the Prairie

An' I give you my conclusion—all that livin'
really means
Is revealed to those who hustle on the home-
stead in their jeans.

Some day I reckon I'll cash in an' file another
claim
Where the wicked cease from troublin' an' the
good get in the game;
Where the pews are not allotted by the fashion
of your dress,
An' the only thing that figures is inherent manli-
ness—
Give me no silk-spangled horses an' no silver-
plated hearse,
But let some student preacher read a bit of
Scripture verse,
An' find a sunny hillside where the water-willow
screens,
An' plant me on the homestead where I hustled—
in my jeans.

Songs of the Prairie

THE HOMESTEADER

FAR away from the din of the city,
I dwell on the prairie alone,
With no one to praise or to pity,
And all the broad earth for my own;
The fields to allure me to labor,
The shanty to shelter my sleep,
A league and a half to a neighbor—
And Collie to watch if I weep.

Yes, this is my place of probation,
Though woefully windy and bare;
I am lord of my own habitation,
I mock at the meaning of care;
For here, on the edge of creation,
Lies, far as the vision can fling,
A kingdom that's fit for a nation—
A kingdom—and I am the king!

The grasses aglare in the moring
With crystalline radiance shine;
The dew-drops are jewels adorning,
Are jewels—and the jewels are mine;

Songs of the Prairie

The heat of the sun when it shineth,
The wet of the wind when it rains,
Are balm to the heart that repineth—
The Medicine Men of the plains!

I follow the plow in the breaking,
I tap the rich treasures of Time—
The treasure is here for the taking,
And taking it isn't a crime;
I ride on the rack or the reaper
To harvest the fruit of my hand,
And daily I know that the deeper
I'm rooting my soul in the land.

They say there is wealth in the doing,
That royal and rich are the gains,
But 't isn't the wealth I am wooing
So much as the life of the plains;
For here in the latter-day morning,
Where Time to Eternity clings,
Midwife to a breed in the borning,
I behold the Beginnings of Things!

When, reckless of time and of trouble,
I watch till the water fowl comes,

Songs of the Prairie

Or, picking my steps in the stubble,
I steal where the prairie hen drums;
When shooting the wolf in the brushes,
Or spearing the pike in the stream,
Or potting the crane in the rushes—
Ambition seems only a dream.

When darkness envelops creation,
And shadows lie deep on the plain,
I sit in my rude habitation
And ponder my childhood again;
Then voices come out of the distance,
Far voices from over the sea,
They call from the depths of existence—
I know they are calling to me!

The voices of song and of motion,
The voices of laughter and light,
They're calling from over the ocean—
Oh, God! could I answer to-night!
The voices of friend and of lover,
The voices I knew in the past—
I turn to my pallet to smother
The thoughts that have found me at last!

.

Songs of the Prairie

*Greater than the measure of the heroes of re-
nown,
He is building for the future, and no hand can
hold him down;
Though they count him but a common man, he
holds the Outer Gate,
And posterity will own him as the father of the
State.*

Songs of the Prairie

VAIN SUITORS

You may tell in fondest phrases
How Venetian glory raises
 Sunlit domes and basking marbles as her
 streets flow to the sea;
Sing of Florence or Geneva
Or the Bay of Naples; weave a
Web of sentiment—but leave a
 Little sentiment for me.

Where the warm Atlantic waters
Lave your laughing sons and daughters
 By a hundred sunny cities where her tides
 flow full and free,
Or on Caribbean beaches
While the water pulls and reaches
At your heart-strings—in your speeches
 Save a sentiment for me.

San Francisco's golden fulgor,
Catalina's horticulture,
 Every symphony of gladness, every gaiety
 there be;

Songs of the Prairie

Every land and every nation
Somewhere claim your admiration:
From your meed of approbation
Save your fealty to me.

.

Cloudless skies and peerless weather
Link my hearts and homes together
And the crisp, pure air of Winter vitalizes
blood and brain;
Prairie breezes softly blowing,
Wheat fields' rustle—cattle lowing—
Broader visions coming—growing—
Woo, O lands, ye woo in vain!

Songs of the Prairie

GOD'S SIGNALMAN

WELL, no, I'm not superstitious,—at least, I don't
call it that,—

But when someone spins a creepy yarn I don't
deny it flat,

For a man who spends a lifetime with the throttle
in his hand

Is bound to have adventures that he cannot un-
derstand;

I sometimes think our knowledge here is but a
sorry show,—

We're only on the borderland of what there is
to know.

I used to think a man could know all things
that could be known;

That he should not acknowledge any power above
his own;

That, however strange the circumstance, there
always is a cause

That is in complete obedience to some of Nature's
laws;

Songs of the Prairie

But I couldn't shake conviction off, no matter
how I tried,
And I've changed my way of thinking since the
night that Willie died.

Yes, Willie was my little son—my greatest
earthly joy—
And wife and I just kind o' seemed to dote upon
the boy;
When I was out on duty she would hover round
the lad,
And treasure up his sayings to repeat them to
his dad;
And every night, at lighting time, I knew that,
without fail,
His baby lips were praying for the man out on
the rail. . . .

Ah, well, for three short years we knew what
such a treasure is,
And we grew ever more attached to those sweet
ways of his;
When one day, swinging through the gate, I
saw, with blanching face,
My wife as pale as ashes, and a doctor in the
place. . . .

Songs of the Prairie

I tried to go in steady, but my knees were knock-
ing hard,
And the light went out of heaven as I staggered
up the yard.

The doctor was a friend of mine, with children
of his own,
But he didn't need to tell me, for a blind man
would have known
By the labored, quick-caught breathing, and the
little burning brow,
That the Visitor was ready and was waiting for
him now.
We sat about his bedside in silent, deep despair,
And the years rolled down upon us as we faced
each other there.

'Twas a little before midnight when a ring came
at the bell,
And the call-boy said, "Excuse me, sir, but I
was sent to tell
That Ninety-six is waiting, and there's no one
else about;
They're expecting you to take her. If you don't
she can't go out."

Songs of the Prairie

I left the answer to my wife. With lips as white
as snow,
She whispered, "Do your duty," and I said, "All
right, I'll go."

My fireman knew my trouble, and in rough-and-
ready way
He let me know his heart was feeling things
he couldn't say;
The night was dark and moonless, but the bright
stars overhead
Seemed to whisper to each other, "His little boy
is dead."
The very locomotive seemed to read my thoughts
aright,
And the monster sobbed in sympathy as we bul-
leted the night.

We'd been running fast and steady till a little
after two;
All the passengers were fast asleep, except, per-
haps, a few
Who sat a-swapping stories in the smoker, when
a sight
Met my eyes that fairly froze my blood in terror
and affright—

Songs of the Prairie

For there, before me, standing in the halo of
the light
Was a little child outlined against the blackness
of the night!

Oh, I could not be mistaken, I would know him
anywhere,
With his father's mouth and forehead, and his
mother's eyes and hair,
And little arms outstretched to me that seemed
to coax and say,
"Come, Daddy, come and kiss me, for I'm going
far away."
I flung the brake and throttle, and amid the hiss-
ing steam
The vision grew, and waned away, and vanished
as a dream!

My fireman was beside me: "Your nerve is
going, Jack;
Let's leave the engine here and take a walk along
the track.
The exercise will do you good." I followed as
he led,
Until we reached the gorge about a hundred
yards ahead:

Songs of the Prairie

The night wind cooled my temples as we walked
the bridge upon,
Till we sudden stopped with a sudden gasp—
—THE CENTRE SPAN WAS GONE!

.

You may call it hallucination, as some of the
others do,
But I know that the Master took my boy that
night at half-past two;
And the prayers of a hundred passengers had
been offered up in vain
Had his spirit, clad in his baby dress, not stood
before my train. . . .
I know I cried in my window-seat, and was
otherwise ill-behaved
But the life that I lost was more to me than all
the lives he saved.

Songs of the Prairie

GOING HOME

THE village lights grew dim behind, the snow
lay vast and white
And silent as an icy shroud spread out upon the
night ;
A wan moon struggled with the clouds and
through the misty haze
The trails that branched to left and right were
tangled as a maze ;
The settler's horses plodded in the soft, un-
certain snow ;
And, stealing cautiously behind, a Thing moved
to and fro.

The trail was little travelled, and the pale, sad,
sickly light
Was hindrance, rather than a help, to read the
road aright ;
A dozen miles lay stretched between the settler
and his shack :
He thought of many things that night—not once
of turning back.

Songs of the Prairie

Above the crunching of the snow he heard the
 rising wind,
But never looked—and never saw—the Thing
 that stole behind.

The trail was lost; the horses took their way
 across the plain;
The settler strove to hold the course, but strove,
 alas, in vain;
The fickle wind seemed scarce to stay a moment
 at a place—
Now howling in a rear attack, now snapping
 at his face;
And nearing, leering, peering, in the ghastly,
 ghostly light,
The Thing came softly after as it followed in
 the night.

A light! a light! a welcome light gleamed
 friendly from afar:
Oh, can it be—it cannot be—'tis surely not a
 star?
Nay, nay, it is more warm and near, a happy
 farmer's home
That beckons to the wanderer, "You need no
 longer roam."

Songs of the Prairie

With eager hope they hastened on, and plied
across the plain;
As often as the horses fell they rose to plunge
again.

The hours moved on, the miles moved on, they
followed as a dream
The waning light, the dying light, of that de-
ceitful gleam,
And when at last it seemed the place must almost
be in sight,
The light went out! Oh, perfidy! Oh, murder-
ous, mocking light!
'Twas well the ears grew deaf before the howling
of the wind,
Nor heard the ghoulish chuckle of the gloating
Thing behind.

The snow lay deep; the horses floundered with
the heavy sleigh,
Till, plunging in a sudden drift, they tore the
tongue away;
The sleepy driver knew it not, as through his
nerveless hands
His hold on life was slipping with the frozen
leather bands.

Songs of the Prairie

The night was calm and beautiful, the frost had
ceased to smart. . . .

*The Thing had leapt upon him and was tearing
at his heart!*

.

The room was warm and cosy, and the light
was soft and low,

Her presence seemed to radiate a tender, girlish
glow,

And when she placed her hand in his, the soft,
caressing palm

Was cure for every trouble, and for every pain
a balm:

And she whispered, "Sweet, my sweetheart, I'll
be faithful, I'll be true;

In the springtime, in the springtime, I will cross
the sea to you." . . .

A little bed was fashioned in the fitful firelight
glow;

A little boy was murmuring a prayer of long
ago;

And mother-hands upon his head, that fondled
in his hair,

And sense of quiet comfort and respite from
every care;

Songs of the Prairie

And a pillow white and downy, and a bed so soft
and deep,

And tired lips were lisping, "Now I lay me
down to sleep." . . .

.

Again the scene was changed: A flood of mel-
low, amber light,

That filled the soul with ecstasy of infinite de-
light;

While crystal-cadenced music tinkled through
the yellow glow,

The lullabies of childhood and the songs of long
ago;

The sea of God on every hand in silent silver
lay:

An atom fell: its circles spread through all
eternity.

.

The Thing was gone; its work was done; a
lump of lifeless clay

Sat crouching, crouching, crouching in the dawn-
ing of the day;

Songs of the Prairie

The frozen eyeballs stared upon a wilderness
of snow,

And peered into the future, to the Place no man
may know.

A she-wolf prowled about the spot, and sniffed
below the sleigh,

And howled a melancholy howl, and slunk in
fear away.

Songs of the Prairie

JUST BE GLAD

FEELIN' kind of all run down?

Mighty bad:

Sick and tired o' life in town?

Don't be sad:

What you're needing isn't rest:

Square your shoulders, raise your chest;

Pack your turkey; go out West—

Just be glad!

Gone astray in No-Man's-Land?

Silly lad!

Ought to have your carcass tanned

With a gad:

Should ha' kept the narrow track:

Never mind, you can't go back;

Things may not be quite so black—

Just be glad!

Gone and blown in all your cash

On a fad?

Livin' now on soup and hash?

Writin' Dad?

Songs of the Prairie

Don't you do it. Here's a tip;
Keep a good stiff upper lip;
Needn't fall because you slip—
Just be glad!

Friends refuse to help you out?
Don't get mad!
You would be a lazy lout
If they had.
Do not envy place or pelf;
Praise the Lord, you've got your health;
Dig in! Be a man yourself—
Just be glad!

All the world may say or do,
Good or bad,
Isn't anything to you—
Just be glad!
Though you work at book or trade,
Though you work with pen or spade,
Hump yourself—you'll make the grade—
Just be glad!

Songs of the Prairie

THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

(Lines suggested in the camp of the Alpine Club of Canada, Sherbrooke Lake, B. C., August, 1911.)

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,"
Of old the Psalmist sung,
And we who clutch the worldly prize,
With Earth's distractions wrung,
Still turn our fevered fancy's gaze
Where snowy summits greet the day,
Where Nature guards her mysteries,
And Time becomes Eternity

Where, changeless in eternal change,
The Rockies clip the clouds,
And glacial lakes and granite range
Sleep, in their snowy shrouds;
Where silence hushes discontent,
And petty fears are lost in space,
The Builder of the firmament
Still meets His people, face to face!

Songs of the Prairie

O barren cares that bitter life,
O hopes unwisely dear,
O fruitless fallacy and strife,
O social, sham veneer!—
I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
Where mantling cloud or cornice clings,
To catch a glimpse of paradise,
And turn again—to little things!

Songs of the Prairie

A PRAIRIE HEROINE

THEY were running out the try-lines, they were
staking out the grade;
Through the hills they had to measure, through
the sloughs they had to wade;
They were piercing unknown regions, they were
crossing nameless streams,
With the prairie for a pillow and the sky above
their dreams,
They were mapping unborn cities in the age-
long pregnant clay:
When they came upon a little mound across the
right-of-way.

There were violets growing on it, and a butter-
cup or two,
That whispered of affection ever old and ever
new,
And a little ring of whitewashed stones, bright
in the summer sun,
But of marble slab or granite pile or pillar there
was none;

Songs of the Prairie

And across the sleeping prairie lay a little, low-
built shack,
With a garden patch before it and a wheat field
at its back.

“Well, boys, we’d better see him, and he hadn’t
ought to kick,
For we’ll give him time to move it if he does
it pretty quick.”
But scarcely had the foreman spoke when straight
across the farm
They saw the settler coming with a rifle on his
arm;
Some would ha’ hiked for cover but they had
no place to run,
But most of them decided they would stay and
see the fun.

The farmer was the first to speak: “I hate to
interfere,
And mighty glad I am to see the railway comin’
near,
But before you drive your pickets across this
piece of land
You ought to hear the story, or you will not
understand:

Songs of the Prairie

It's the story of a girl who was as true as she
was brave,
And all that now remains of her is in that little
grave.

"I didn't want to bring her when I hit the trail
out West,
I knew I shouldn't do it, and I did my level
best
To coax her not to come out for a year or two
at least,
But to stay and take it easy with her friends
down in the East;
But while I coaxed and argued I was feelin'
mighty glum,
And right down in my heart I kep' a-hopin' she
would come.

"Well, by rail and boat and saddle we got out
here at last,
A-livin' in the future, and forgettin' of the past;
We built ourselves a little home, and in our
work and care
It seemed to me she always took what was the
lion's share;

Songs of the Prairie

God knows just what she suffered, but she hid
it with a smile,
And made out that she thought I was the only
thing worth while.

"She stood it through the summer and the warm,
brown days of fall,
And of all the voices calling her she would not
hear the call;
But when the winter settled with its cold, white
pall of snow
She seemed to whiten with it, but she thought
I didn't know;
She tried to keep her spirits up and laugh my
fears away,
But I saw her growing thin and ever weaker
day by day.

"At last I couldn't stand it any longer, so I
said,
'I think you'd better try and spend a day or two
in bed
While I go for a doctor. It's only sixty miles.'
She gave a little wistful look, half hidden in her
smiles,

Songs of the Prairie

And said, 'Perhaps you'd better, though I think
I'll be all right
When the spring comes.' . . . Well, I started
out that night.

"I made the trip on horseback, by the guiding
Polar star
And a dozen times the distance never seemed
one half so far.
But the doctor had gone out of town,—just
where, no one could say,
And a lump rose in my chest that fairly took
my breath away.
But I daren't stay there thinking, and my search
for him was vain,
So I bought some wine and brandy and I started
home again.

"Forgetful of my horse, I spent the whole night
on the road,
Till early in the morning he collapsed beneath
his load;
I saw the brute was done for, and although it
made me cry,
I hacked into his jug'lar vein and left him there
to die;

Songs of the Prairie

And then I shouldered the supplies and staggered on alone,
And thinking of my wife's distress I quite forgot my own.

"She must ha' watched all night for me, for in the morning grey
She saw me stagger in the snow and fall beside the way
And God knows how she did it—she was only skin and bone—
But she came out here and found me and dragged me home alone,
And she took the precious liquor that had cost us all so dear,
And poured it down this worthless hulk that's standin' blatin' here. . . .

"I guess you know what happened—I lived, she passed away;
I robed her in her wedding-dress and laid her in the clay;
And every spring I plant the flowers that grow upon her grave,
For I hold the spot as sacred as the Arima-thæn's cave;

Songs of the Prairie

And when the winter snows have come, and
all is white and still,
I spread a blanket on the mound to keep out
frost and chill.

“Folks say I’ve got a screw loose, that I’ve gone
to acting queer,
But I sometimes hear her speaking, and I know
she’s always near;
And sometimes in the night I feel the pressure
of her hand,
And for a blessed hour I share with her the
Promised Land:—
Let man or devil undertake to desecrate my dead
And as sure as God’s in heaven I will pump him
full of lead.”

They were rough-and-ready railway men who
stood about the spot,
They were men that lied and gambled they were
men that drank and fought,
But some of them were sneezing, and some were
coughing bad,
And some were blowing noses on anything they
had;

Songs of the Prairie

And some of them were swallowing at lumps
that shouldn't come,
And some were swearing softly, and some were
simply dumb.

At last the foreman found his voice: "I guess
your claim is sound;
I wouldn't care to run a track across that piece
of ground. . . .
We'll have to change our lay-out . . . but I hope
. . . we have the grace
To build a fitting monument to mark that holy
place;
Put me down for a hundred; now, boys, how
much for you?"
And they answered in a chorus, "We'll see the
business through."

.

The passengers upon a certain railway o'er the
plain
See a shining shaft of marble from the windows
of the train,

Songs of the Prairie

But they do not know the story of the girl-wife
in the snow
And the broken-hearted farmer with his lonely
life of woe,
And none of them have guessed that the deflec-
tion in the line
Is the railway builders' tribute to a prairie
heroine.

Songs of the Prairie

THE SEER

IN the dingy dust of his deerskin tent sat the
chief of a dying race,
And the lake that lapt at his wigwam door threw
back a frowning face,
And a sightless squaw at the centre-pole crooned
low in a hybrid speech,
When a man of God swept round the point and
landed on the beach.

The heavy eyes grew bright with fire, the lips
shaped to a sneer—
“Welcome, my paleface brother, what good news
brings you here?
Are you come with the voice of healing, with
the book of your blameless breed,
To soothe my soul with comfort while my body
gnaws with need?

“Welcome, O paleface brother; come, what have
you to fear?
Mayhap the redskin chieftain can teach as well
as hear;

Songs of the Prairie

And while we sing your sacred songs and breathe
your mystic prayer,
Who knows what inspiration may come on the
ev'ning air? . . .

"Listen; you are a scholar, schooled in the pale-
face lore:

'Tis said a dying saint may sometimes see the
shining shore;

That closing eyes peer far beyond the realm of
mortal sight,—

Who knows but that a dying race may read the
road aright?

"A dying race! We know it; the land is ours
no more,

No more we roam the prairies as in the days
of yore;

The brave, free spirit that was ours is crushed
and passed away,

And bodies without spirits are predestined to
decay.

"No matter. In the summertime the flowers
bloom in the grass,

The startled insects flood the fields and chirrup
as you pass,

Songs of the Prairie

The birds sing in the bushes; but before the
wintry blast

The flowers and the insects and the little birds
are past.

“Yet once again the spring will come, the flowers
will bloom again,

And insects chirrup blithely where the former
ones are lain;

The white snows of the wintertime will vanish
in the heat,

And out-door life and color will follow their
defeat.

“Can the paleface read the riddle? Has he eyes
to see the signs?

Or thinketh he that snow will lie forever on the
pines?

That housed-up life can triumph for the mastery
of state,

Or cushioned chairs produce a race destined to
dominate?

“Behold, the things your hands have done, the
power your arts have won—

Behold, those things shall vanish as the snow
before the sun;

Songs of the Prairie

The snow that smothered out the red—ah, hear
it if you can—

Shall leave the earth as suddenly, *and leave it
brown and tan.*

“Hear ye a little lesson—surely ye know its
worth—

Only an out-door nation can be master of the
earth;

Soon as ye seek your couches, soft with the spoils
of trade—

See well to your outer trenches before the mines
are laid!

“Hear ye a little lesson—can ye the truth
divine?

Milk ye may mix with water, and water will
mix with wine;

Mix as ye may on your prairies, mix in your
hope, and toil,

But know in all your mixing that water won't
mix with oil!”

In the dingy dusk of his deerskin tent sat the
chief of a dying race,

And the glow of holy prophecy lit up his rugged
face,

Songs of the Prairie

And the foremost light of the setting sun fell
far on an eastern land,—
*And who shall save the paleface if he will not
understand?*

Songs of the Prairie

THE SON OF MARQUIS NODDLE

HE is brand-new out from England and he
thinks he knows it all—

(There's a bloomin' bit o' goggle in his eye)
The "colonial" that crosses him is going to get
a fall—

(There's a seven-pound revolver on his thigh).
He's a son of Marquis Noddle, he's a nephew
of an earl,

In the social swim of England he's got 'em all
awhirl,

He's as confident as Cæsar and as pretty as a
girl—

Oh, he's out in deadly earnest, do or die.

They will spot him in the cities by the cowhide
on his feet—

(They were built for crushing cobblestones
at 'ome)

And the giddy girls will giggle when they see
him on the street —

(There's a brand-new cowboy hat upon his
dome).

Songs of the Prairie

He has come from home and kindred to the
land beyond the sea,
To the far-famed land of plenty, to the country
of the free,
But he can't forget he owns it from Cape Race
to Behring Sea—
He is coming just as Cæsar would to Rome.

When his pile is getting slender he'll go looking
for a job,
(And he thinks he ought to get it, don't-cher-
know)
But he finds that he must mingle with the com-
mon city mob
(How *can* they think that he would stoop so
low?).
So he hikes him to the country, where the rustics
will be proud
To salute him when they meet him, and to whis-
per, nice and loud,
"He's the son of Marquis Noddle,—you would
know him in a crowd"—
They will pay him there the homage that they
owe.

Songs of the Prairie

In the little country village he will manufacture
mirth—

(For it's there they take the measure of a
swell)

They will soon proceed to teach him that he
doesn't own the earth

(With a quit-claim on the sun and moon as
well).

They will show him that the country isn't alto-
gether slow,

And that they can travel any pace that he's a
mind to go;

He will be a right good fellow till they run him
out of dough—

Oh, it is a tale of merriment they tell!

So to keep his bones together he goes working
on a farm,

(Where they get up at a little after two)

Where they think to take him down a peg will
not do him any harm,

(And they sleep when there is nothing else to
do).

Where they work him like a nigger nearly twenty
hours a day,

And they don't disguise the fact that they con-
sider him a jay,

Songs of the Prairie

And he eats so much and sleeps so much he isn't
worth his pay—

Oh, it doesn't matter that his blood is blue.

He decides to do a season as a cowboy in the
West,

(Where they call a man a boy until he's dead)

And he tries to walk a-swagger with a military
chest,

(And he isn't overslept or overfed).

They will set him breaking bronchos, though it's
little to his mind;

With many new-learned epithets he'll perforate
the wind—

How can he know the boys have stuck a thistle
on behind?

He will end the exhibition on his head.

They will fill him full of liquor that'll frizzle
his inside,

(In the cooler he can square it with his God).

He will spend his nights in places where the
demi-monde reside,

(In the morning he'll be minus watch and
wad).

Songs of the Prairie

They'll abuse him as a youngster, they will mock
him as a man,

They'll make his life a thorny path in every way
they can,

Till he curses his existence and the day that it
began,

And he wishes he was rotting in the sod.

He will write long tales to England, tales of
bitterness and woe,

(They will print 'em in the papers over there).

He will tell them pretty nearly everything he
doesn't know,

(And they'll take it all for gospel over there).

He will tell them that the country isn't fit for
gentlemen,

That any who escape from it do not come back
again,

He is handy with his language and he wields a
bitter pen—

To the truth of each assertion he would swear.

He's a growler, he's a growser, he's a nuisance,
he's a bum,

(And the country hasn't any room for such)

And they class him in the papers as "European
scum,"

Songs of the Prairie

(They would rather have the Irish or the Dutch).

He's the butt of every jester, he's the mark of every joke,

He is wearing borrowed trousers—he has put his own in soak—

He's a useless good-for-nothing, beaten, buffeted, and broke,

And of sympathy he won't get over-much.

.

In a dozen years you'll find him with a section of his own,

(He had to learn his lesson at the start)

With a happy wife and children he is trying to atone—

(For he loves the country now with all his heart).

He's a son of dear old England, he's a hero, he's a brick;

He's the kind you may annihilate but you can never lick,

For he played and lost, and played and lost, and stayed and took the trick;

In a world of men he'll play a manly part.

THE PRODIGALS

KNEE-DEEP our prairies link the seas,
Flood-full our voiceless rivers wend;
We hold unturned the larder keys
On which the future years depend:
And shall we suffer alien throngs
Usurp the land to us belongs?

What though we are to fortune born
And all our paths are paved with gold?
We flaunt our folly up to scorn,
Because we keep not what we hold:
Why should we rob our right of birth
To foster all the breeds of earth?

We picture with unfeigned dismay
Man-glutted lands of other flags,
They multiply but to decay,
And rot in pestilence and rags;
Why hasten we to emulate
These helpless tragedies of Fate?

Songs of the Prairie

The land our children's sons will need,
That land we have wide open thrown
To heathen knaves of other breed
And paunchy pirates of our own:
 We give away earth's greatest prize,
 And pat ourselves, and call us wise.

No father he who to the slums
For husband to his child would send,
And no one worthy of her comes
She lives a maiden to the end:
 Yet we have placed our virgin trust
 In spawn of Continental lust.

If dumb we be to Reason's cries—
Our children's cause she pleads in vain—
Our outraged sons at length will rise
And seize their heritage again;
 And fools, who prate of vested right,
 Will either cease to prate—or fight.

The land is ours, the land will keep,
And Time is nowise near its end;
We hold our birthright all too cheap
Its sacredness to comprehend;
 In after years our sons will say,
 “Why frittered ye the land away?”

Songs of the Prairie

THE SQUAD OF ONE

SERGEANT BLUE of the Mounted Police was a
so-so kind of a guy;
He swore a bit, and he lied a bit, and he boozed
a bit on the sly;
But he held the post at Snake Creek Bend for
country and home and God,
And he cursed the first and forgot the rest—
which wasn't the least bit odd.

Now the life of the North West Mounted Police
breeds an all-round kind of man;
A man who can jug a down-South thug when
he rushes the red-eye can;
A man who can pray with a dying bum or break
up a range stampede—
Such are the men of the Mounted Police and
such are the men they breed.

The snow lay deep at the Snake Creek post and
deep to east and west,
And the Sergeant had made his ten-league beat
and settled down to rest

Songs of the Prairie

In his two-by-four that they called a "post,"
where the flag flew overhead,
And he took a look at his monthly mail, and this
is the note he read:

"To Sergeant Blue of the Mounted Police at the
post of Snake Creek Bend,
From U. S. Marshal of County Blank, greetings
to you, my friend,
They's a team of toughs give us the slip, though
they shot up a couple of blokes,
And we reckon they's hid in Snake Creek Gulch
and posin' as farmer folks.

"They's as full of sin as a barrel of booze and
as quick as a cat with a gun.
So if you happen to hit their trail be first to
start the fun;
And send out your strongest squad of men and
round them up if you can,
For dead or alive we want them here. Yours
truly, Jack McMann."

And Sergeant Blue sat back and smiled, "Ho,
here is a chance of game!
Folks 'round here have been so good that life is
getting tame;

Songs of the Prairie

I know the lie of Snake Creek Gulch—where I
used to set my traps—
I'll blow out there to-morrow and I'll bring
them in—perhaps."

Next morning Sergeant Blue, arrayed in farmer
smock and jeans,
In a jumper sleigh he had made himself set out
for the evergreens
That grow on the bank of Snake Creek Gulch
by a homestead shack he knew,
And a smoke curled up from the chimney-pipe
to welcome Sergeant Blue.

"Aha, and that looks good to me," said the
Sergeant to the smoke,
"For the lad that owns this homestead shack is
East in his wedding-yoke;
There are strangers here and I'll bet a farm
against a horn of booze
That they are the bums that are predestined to
dangle in a noose."

So he drove his horse to the shanty door and
hollered a loud "Good-day,"
And a couple of men with fighting-irons came
out beside the sleigh,

Songs of the Prairie

And the Sergeant said, "I'm a stranger here and
I've driven a weary mile;
If you don't object I'll just sit down by the
stove in the shack awhile."

So the Sergeant sat and smoked and talked of the
home he had left down East,
And the cold, and the snow, and the price of land,
and the life of man and beast,
But all of a sudden he broke it off with, "Neighbors,
take a nip?
There's a horn of the best you'll find out there
in my jumper, in the grip."

So one of the two went out for it, and as soon
as he closed the door
The other one staggered back as he gazed up the
nose of a forty-four,
But the Sergeant wasted no words with him,
"Now, fellow, you're on the rocks,
And a noise as loud as a mouse from you and
they'll take you out in a box."

So he fastened the bracelets to his wrists and
his legs with some binder-thread,
And he took his knife and he took his gun and he
rolled him onto the bed;

Songs of the Prairie

And then as number two came in he said, "If
you want to live,
Put up your dukes and behave yourself or I'll
make you into a sieve."

And when he had coupled them each to each,
and laid them out on the bed,
"It's cold, and I guess we'd better eat before we
go," he said.
So he fried some pork and he warmed some
beans, and he set out the best he saw,
And they ate thereof, and he paid for it, accord-
ing to British law.

That night in the post sat Sergeant Blue with
paper and pen in hand,
And this is the word he wrote and signed and
mailed to a foreign land:
"To U. S. Marshall of County Blank, greetings
I give to you;
My squad has just brought in your men, and
the squad was

"Sergeant Blue."

Songs of the Prairie

*There are things unguessed, there are tales untold,
in the life of the great lone land,
But here is a fact that the prairie-bred alone may understand,
That a thousand miles in the fastness the fear
of the law obtains,
And the pioneers of justice were the "Riders of
the Plains."*

Songs of the Prairie

ALKALI HALL

WHEN Lord Landseeker came out West to have
a look around,
And spend a little money if the right thing could
be found,
He hadn't breathed the prairie air more than a
day or two
Until he was the centre of a philanthropic crew
Who sought to show His Lordship all the short-
cuts to success
(Though why they should have troubled, His
Lorship couldn't guess,
For each was losing money, as he candidly
confessed,
Which seemed to be a fashion with the dealers
in the West).

Thus His Lorship grew suspicious that his
"friends" would turn him down,
And he quietly bought a ticket to a little country
town;

Songs of the Prairie

But he didn't know the message that was flashed
along the wire
To a simple country dealer in the land of his
desire;
And it read: "Look out for Goggles, he'll be
with you this a. m."
And the crowd around the station—well, he
merely smiled to them,
And thought it jolly decent they'd assemble,
don'tcherknow,
And file along behind him as they followed, in
a row.

The snow had fallen softly all the calm Novem-
ber night,
And the morning found the prairies with a cover-
ing of white;
But His Lordship took a citizen who "happened"
in his way,
And they drove into the country for the most
part of the day,
Until they reached a section that was flat and
free from stone,
And the citizen remarked about a fellow he had
known

Songs of the Prairie

Who offered thirty dollars for this section in
the fall,
But the owner wanted forty, or he wouldn't sell
at all.

Then His Lordship drove across it, and it
seemed to catch his eye,
And he whispered to the driver, "That's the
section I will buy;"
So in town they found the owner, who was very
loath to sell,
But he finally consented, if His Lordship wouldn't
tell
That the price was forty dollars by the acre; this
agreed,
A lawyer drew the papers and His Lordship
got the deed,
And he sailed across the ocean with the satisfy-
ing thought
That he'd followed his own judgment in the
bargain he had bought.

The winter snows had vanished and the spring
was growing late.
When Lord Landseeker came again to view his
real estate,

Songs of the Prairie

And he drove out in a buggy to where his section
lay,
And his heart was very happy as he smoked
along the way
Till the section burst upon them, and he scarce
believed his sight,
For the land lay in the sunshine, flashing back
a snowy white
And His Lordship stooped and felt it, and he
heaved a little sigh,
As the knowledge dawned upon him that his
land was—*alkali!*

His Lordship did some thinking as they jour-
neyed back to town,
And his wonted happy features were o'er-
shadowed with a frown;
But he neither crawled nor blustered, neither
bluffed nor swore nor kicked,
(For the men from little England never know
when they are licked),
But he advertised for tenders for construction
on the land,
And the buildings he erected were the best he
could command;

Songs of the Prairie

With a hundred rooms for students, and quarters
for the staff,
And the workmen often wondered what made
His Lordship laugh!

In the papers of Old England there appeared
a little ad,
For the benefit of parents whose sons were going
bad;
"Teach your boys the art of farming in the great
Canadian West;
Our instruction is unrivalled, our curriculum
the best;
There's a grate in every chamber and a bath in
every hall,
And a full dress-suited dinner every ev'ning,
free to all;
There is tennis, polo, marksmanship, and half
the day in bed,
And we make them into farmers for a hundred
pounds a head."

.
His Lordship's college prospers and is crowded
to the doors
With "students" playing poker while the "ser-
vants" do the chores;

Songs of the Prairie

What they do not know of farming they make
up in other lines

They are judges of tobacco and connoisseurs of
wines;

They are experts at the races and at sundry
other games—

Though they couldn't tell the breeching of the
harness from the hames—

Though they're far from home and kindred they
occasion no alarm,

*That was what their parents wanted when they
sent them out to farm.*

Songs of the Prairie

PRAIRIE BORN

WE have heard the night wind howling as we
lay alone in bed ;

We have heard the grey goose honking as he
journeyed overhead ;

We have smelt the smoke-wraith flying in the
hot October wind,

And have fought the fiery demon that came roar-
ing down behind ;

We have seen the spent snow sifting through
the key-hole of the door,

And the frost-line crawling, crawling, like a
snake, along the floor ;

We have felt the storm-fiend wrestle with the
rafters in his might,

And the baffled blizzard shrieking through the
turmoil of the night.

We have felt the April breezes warm along the
plashy plains ;

We have mind-marked to the cadence of the
falling April rains ;

Songs of the Prairie

We have heard the crash of water where the
snow-fed rivers run,
Seen a thousand silver lakelets lying shining in
the sun ;
We have known the resurrection of the Spring-
time in the land,
Heard the voice of Nature calling and the words
of her command,
Felt the thrill of springtime twilight and the
vague, unfashioned thought
That the season's birthday musters from the
hopes we had forgot.

We have heard the cattle lowing in the silent
summer nights ;
We have smelt the smudge-fire fragrance—we
have seen the smudge-fire lights—
We have heard the wild duck grumbling to his
mate along the bank ;
Heard the thirsty horses snorting in the stream
from which they drank ;
Heard the voice of Youth and Laughter in the
long, slow-gloaming night ;
Seen the arched electric splendor of the Great
North's livid light ;

Songs of the Prairie

Read the reason of existence—felt the touch
that was divine—
And in eyes that glowed responsive saw the End
of God's design.

We have smelt the curing wheat fields and the
scent of new-mown hay;
We have heard the binders clatter through the
dusty autumn day;
We have seen the golden stubble gleaming
through the misty rain;
We have seen the plow-streaks widen as they
turned it down again;
We have heard the threshers humming in the
cool September night;
We have seen their dark procession by the straw-
piles' eerie light;
We have heard the freight trains groaning, slip-
ping, grinding, on the rail,
And the idle trace chains jingle as they jogged
along the trail.

We have felt the cold of winter—cursed by
those who know it not—
We have braved the blizzard's vengeance, dared
its most deceptive plot:

Songs of the Prairie

We have learned that hardy races grow from
hardy circumstance,
And we face a dozen dangers to attend a country
dance ;
Though our means are nothing lavish we have
always time for play,
And our social life commences at the closing of
the day ;
We have time for thought and culture, time for
friendliness and friend,
And we catch a broader vision as our aspira-
tions blend.

We have hopes to others foreign, aims they
cannot understand,
We, the "heirs of all the ages," we, the first-
fruits of the land ;
Though we think with fond affection of the
shores our fathers knew,
And we honor all our brothers—for a brother's
heart is true—
Though we stand with them for progress, peace,
and unity, and power,
Though we die with them, if need be, in our
nation's darkest hour—

Songs of the Prairie

Still the prairies call us, call us, when all other
voices fail,
And the call we knew in childhood is the call
that must prevail.

Songs of the Prairie

"A COLONIAL"

(In some circles the term "colonial" is still allowed to imply inferiority and dependence.)

ONLY a Colonial!

Only a man of nerve and heart
Who has spurned the ease of the life "at home,"

Only a man who would play his part
In a new breed-birth on a distant loam;
Only a man of sense and worth
Who is not afraid of the ends of earth.

Only a Colonial!

Only a man who has cornered Fate
And matched his strength with the Unattained;

Only the guard at the Outer Gate,
Who holds for you what he has gained,
That your children, seized of a better sense,
May share with him Toil's recompense.

Songs of the Prairie

Only a Colonial!

Only a man who has bridged the deep,
And stained the map a British hue,
Who builds an Empire while ye sleep
And deeds the ownership to you.
'Tis the Viking blood which gave you birth
That has driven him to the ends of earth.

•

Only a Colonial!

Wherever the flag that ye think is great
Is flown to the farthest winds that blow,
Wherever the colonists ye berate
In their blind faith-vision onward go,
Ye may find ye hearts that are British still—
In your self-conceit do ye count them nil?

Only a Colonial!

Rough as the bark of his forest tree
His ways may seem to the fat and sleek,
But ye owe your Empire to such as he,
Though the hoar-frost glisten on his cheek;
He has carried your flag where ye dared not go,
And little ye reck of the debt ye owe.

Songs of the Prairie

Only a Colonial!

No doubt he is raw on your social laws
And grates on your sense of caste and creed,
But he lives too near to Facts and Cause
To study heraldry and breed;
And, knowing man in his primal state,
He scorns the claims of the social great.

Only a Colonial!

The name in cheap contempt ye fling,
Is not the whim of birth or chance,
We well ignore the flippant sting,
Or charge it to your ignorance;
The colonist, and sons of his,
Have made the Empire what it is.

Songs of the Prairie

LITTLE TIM TROTTER

LITTLE Tim Trotter was born in the West,
Where the prairie lies sunny and brown;
Never was, surely, so welcome a guest
In the stateliest halls of the town;
For Little Tim Trotter was thoughtful and brave,
And a lover of summer and shower,
And Little Tim Trotter took less than he gave
To the hearts that were under his power.

Little Tim Trotter would play in the sun,
Or lie in the buffalo grass,
And in fancy he saw the wild buffalo run
And the brave-riding Indians pass;
And with eyes that were deep as the infinite blue
He would picture himself at their head,
For no one so young as this hunter-man knew
That the herds and the riders were dead.

Little Tim Trotter would lie in his bed
While the fire-light played low on the floor,
And strange were the thought that in Little Tim's
head

Songs of the Prairie

Played low like the fire at the door ;
The hopes that were his, and the wonders he
knew,
And the yearning he had in his heart,
With the glimmering light of the future in view,
And Little Tim just at the start !

Little Tim Trotter has heard the long call
And has answered with joy and surprise,
And the thoughts and the things that are hid
from us all
To-day are revealed to his eyes ;
And he rides in the van of his buffalo herd,
Or in camp with his Indians brave ;
But Little Tim Trotter speaks never a word
Through the mound of a little green grave.

Songs of the Prairie

THE VORTEX

HE farmed his own half-section and was doing
fairly well ;

There were seasons when the yield was rather
small,

But he always had his living and had always
stuff to sell,

And a little to his credit in the fall ;

But he wearied of his labor and he turned
a wistful eye

Where the City flashed its glamour on the
stranger passing by ;

He was sick of hogs and cattle—he was
sick of barn and sty,

And the City sucked him in.

He was doing homestead duties—he was in his
second year,

And his quarter was the finest out-of-doors ;
He'd a neighbor in the township—and they called
that pretty near,

And he only had to eat and do the chores ;

Songs of the Prairie

Now he should have been contented with
a kingdom of his own;

He'd a fiddle and a rifle and a "bally
gramophone" . . .

He was sick of isolation, sick of living
there alone,

And the City sucked him in.

He owned a little country store and traded goods
for eggs;

He was salesman, buyer, manager and clerk;
And the farmers gathered in his shop and sat
around on kegs

While they smoked and wised they didn't have
to work;

He was tired of tasting butter that he
didn't dare condemn,

He was tired of narrow farmers, he was
tired of serving them,

And he thought him of the City, where
they close at six P. M.,

And the City sucked him in.

He ran a country paper in the town of Easy-go,
And he hustled news and helped to "dis" the
"dead";

Songs of the Prairie

He was editor and devil, he was master of the
show,

And the Union had no halter on his head ;

But he couldn't raise his circulation over
twenty quires,

He was tired of washing rollers, he was
tired of building fires,

He was tired of eulogizing men he knew
were mostly liars,

And the City sucked him in.

He practised law and real estate and owned a
house and lot ;

He'd a client every once-awhile or so ;

He drove into the country when the summer
days were hot,

Or in winter for a sleigh-ride in the snow ;

He'd enough to live in comfort and he
always paid his bills,

But he tired of country customs and he
wanted Fashion's frills ;

He was sick of fire insurance, he was sick
of drawing wills,

And the City sucked him in.

Songs of the Prairie

He'd a loyal congregation and his views were
orthodox

Though his salary was less than he was worth,
He'd a personal regard for the future of his
flocks,

And he shared with them their sorrow and
their mirth;

But he longed for larger service and for
bright companionship,

And a stipend that would justify his wife
to take a trip;

And he read his resignation and he packed
his little grip,

And the City sucked him in.

She was just a country maiden with ambitions of
her own,

She could wash and she could churn and she
could cook,

But she longed for broader vision and a bigger,
better zone,

And she studied all about it in a book;

She'd a home and she had kindred, she'd
a roof above her head,

She had time for work and leisure, she'd
a chance to love and wed;

Songs of the Prairie

But they saw her leave the village—they
had better seen her dead—

And the City sucked her in.

Now there's one of them a millionaire and one
of them in jail,

And one of them is working on the street;

And one is washing dishes, and one has "hit the
trail,"

For six have drunk the sorrows of defeat;

And one that's never spoken of where
once she was supreme,

And one—they found him floating in an
eddy of the stream:

They have paid the price of knowledge,
they have dreamed their little dream:

And the City sucked them in.

Songs of the Prairie

THE OLD GUARD

KNEW you the men of the Old Guard? Men
of the camp and trail;
Guard of the van when Time began in the land
of grass and gale,
Of a sky-wide land they seized command where
the mightiest prevail.

Who were the men of the Old Guard? Giants
of strength and will,
Trained in the school of hard-luck rule and
daring to die or kill;
Staking their lives, and their young, and wives,
on the road up Fortune's hill.

Whence were the men of the Old Guard?
Heroes of '82;
From swamp and ledge and ocean's edge they
came to see and do,
And they failed at first, and the land they cursed,
but they stayed and struggled through.

Songs of the Prairie

Hope of the men of the Old Guard? Little but
hope was theirs;
With empty hand in an untried land they clutched
at wheat and tares,
And home at night by the wood-fire light was
answer to their prayers.

Way of the men of the Old Guard? What of
their end and way?
You may find their bones by the lime-white
stones where the sun-dried sleugh-holes lay,
For the Goddess Trade is a costly jade, and they
were the the ones to pay.

Joy of the men of the Old Guard? The joy of
the brave and true;
With joy they paced where Death grimaced and
his icy vapors blew,
And with steady tread they bore their dead with
the faith of the chosen few.

What of the men of the Old Guard? Ask of the
arching skies,
The grass that waves on their leafy graves is
lispering their lullabies,
And the lives they spent are their monument
and their title to Paradise.

Songs of the Prairie

KID McCANN

WHERE the farthest foothills flatten to a circle-
sweeping plain,
And the cattle lands surrender to the onward
march of grain,
Where the prairies stretch unbroken to the cor-
ners of the sky,
And the foremost wheat fields rustle in the warm
winds droning by—
There a crippled cowboy batches in the haunts
of old-time herds,
And the balance of the story is repeated in his
words:

So you never heard how I lost my leg and hobble
now on a crutch?
So far as the story relates to me it can't concern
you much,
For it's really the story of Kid McCann and the
price that a girl will pay
For the fellow she sets her fancy on, as only a
woman may;

Songs of the Prairie

It isn't every girl who proves her faithfulness in
flames,

But fellows who listen with moistened eyes speak
softly of other names.

Ned McCann owned the Double Star 'way back
in the early days;

He had come out here with a sickly wife and a
kid he hoped to raise

Where the climate suited the feeble-lunged, but
life was scarce at its brim,

Till a little mound by a prairie hill held half of the
world for him;

And his double love would have spoiled the child
had she been like me or you,

But her only thought was for her dad and the
mother she scarcely knew.

'Course, she was bred to the ranges, and before
she had reached her teens

She could straddle a nag with the best of us and
ride in her smock and jeans

Till we all caved in, and she thought it fun to
camp with the round-up bunch,

And she shared her pillow and shared our sky and
shared our pipe and lunch,

Songs of the Prairie

And all of us mad in love with her, but she was
only a kid,

And she never dreamt what our feelings were, or
the love-struck things we did.

But even girls grow older, and, though always
kind and sweet,

There came a day when she realized that we were
at her feet,

But I had never spoken, nor anyone in the camp,
When in came a foreign puncher, a thoroughbred
black-leg scamp,

And we who had known her since childhood saw,
in our unbelieving eyes,

This wily sinner setting himself to carry off the
prize.

Of course it couldn't be stood for, and little as I
might like,

It fell to my lot to intimate to him it was time to
hike,

Which I did in straightforward manner, in a
way to be understood,

And he looked at me with a sulky scowl that
boded none of us good;

Songs of the Prairie

But he did as he was ordered, to be absent before
night,
And we lost his form in the shadowy East as he
cantered out of sight.

Next day, as I rode on my cayuse, apart from the
rest of the gang,
I felt a sudden rip in my leg like the jab of a
red-hot tang;
And my horse went down below me, with my
leg crushed in the clay,
And over me leered that fiendish face, and he
grinned, and rode away;
Rode away to the eastward,—I saw him fade in
the sky,
And crushed and pinned from hip to heel I
counted the hours to die.

How long I lay I could never tell, for the hours
were days to me,
Till struck with sudden terror I tore at my
wounded knee,
For the east wind carried a smoky smell, and I
read in its fiery breath
That half-a-mile of sun-dried grass was all
between me and death;

Songs of the Prairie

With my hunting-knife I hacked my leg, but I
couldn't cut the bone,
So I set myself as best I could to face my fate
alone.

The fire came on like a hungry fiend on the wings
of the rising wind,

And I wouldn't care to tell you all the things
that were in my mind ;

I saw the sun through the swirling smoke and
the blue sky far above,

And I bade good-bye to the things of earth and
the dearer hopes of love ;

And I figured that I had closed accounts for life's
uncertain span,

When a smoke-blind broncho galloped up and
there sat Kid McCann !

There wasn't much time for talking, with the
death-roll in our ears,

But we sometimes live in seconds more than we
could in a thousand of years,

And before I could guess her meaning she had
thrown herself on my face,

And spread her leather jacket, which her warm
hands held in place ;

I felt her breath in my nostrils and her finger-
tips in my hair,

Songs of the Prairie

And through the roar of the burning grass I
fancied I heard a prayer.

'Twas but for a moment ; the flames were gone ;
unharm'd they had pass'd me by ;

God knows why the useless are spared to live
while the faithful are call'd to die,

But the form that had sheltered me shiver'd,
and seem'd to shrivel away,

And when I had rais'd it clear of my face I
look'd into lifeless clay. . . .

And darkness fell, and the world was black, and
the last of my reason fled,

And when I came to myself again I was back at
the ranch, in bed.

That was back in the Eighties, and still I am
living here ;

I built this shanty on the spot ; her grave is
lying near ;

And when at nights my nostrils sense the smoke-
smell in the air

I seem to feel her form again, and hear again
her prayer ;

And then the darkness settles down and wild
night-creatures cry,

But stars come out in heaven and there's comfort
in the sky.

Songs of the Prairie

WHO OWNS THE LAND?

WHO owns the land?

The Duke replied,
"I own the land. My fathers died
In winning it from foreign hands,
They paid in red blood for their lands;
Their swarthy *villains* bit the dust
In founding the Landowners' Trust;
And many generations dead
Substantiate what I have said,
The land belongs to us because
We've had the making of the laws."

Who owns the land?

The Common Man
Said, "Government adopts a plan
By which the land is held in fee
For common folks, like you an' me.
The man who'd alter it's a crank;
I got the transfer—in the bank—
I've little time to think about
These theories silly fellows shout,
I have to work to beat the band
To pay the mortgage on the land."

Songs of the Prairie

Who owns the land?

The Stateman said,

“The land supplies our daily bread,
And raises wheat, and corn, and oats,
And simple husbandmen—and votes—
The land was won at awful cost
And many soldiers’ lives were lost.
Too bad! They’re mostly silly boys
Who go to battle for the noise.
Here’s a quotation I admire:
‘The people’s voice is God’s desire,’
And as I rule by right divine,
I half suspect the land is mine.”

Who owns the land?

The Farmer said,

“What puts that question in yer head?
I own it. Tuk a homestead here
An’ lived on it fer twenty year;
I bet a new ten dollar bill
That I could hold it down until
I got the patent, an’ I won;
The land is mine, as sure’s a gun.
When city blokes come here to shoot,
You bet, they get the icy boot!

Songs of the Prairie

But 't made me mighty mad when that
Danged railway come across the flat
An' cut my homestead plumb in two,
But there I wuz—what could I do?
But jest set down, resigned to fate,
Fer fear that they'd expropriate."

Who owns the land?

The Speculator

Said, "Land is just an incubator
In which to let your dollars hatch
And, some fine morning—sell the batch."

Who owns the land?

The Indian Chief

Said, "Ugh, the white man mucha thief!
He steal my lan' because he's strong
(By gar, it take him pretty long),
He steal my lan', an' call it law,
He turn me out, me an' my squaw;
He let us die, because we not
Like him, can live in one same spot;
He talk so much of civilize—
He's civil—sometimes—an' he lies!"

Songs of the Prairie

Who owns the land?

The Over-Rich

Said, "All these people claim to, which
Is satisfactory to me,
So long as they cannot agree.
Let them arrange it as they will
As long as some one pays the bill.
The present plan is, surely, fine;
The interest, at least, is mine."

Who owns the land?

In meek surprise

The child said, "Like the air, and skies,
And running water, flowers, and birds,
And lullabies, and gentle words,
And rosy sunsets, clouds, and storms,
And God revealed in all His forms—
'Tis plain the land's the right of birth
Of every creature on the earth:
*No man can make a grain of sand;
How can he say he owns the land?"*

Songs of the Prairie

A RACE FOR LIFE

(As related for the benefit of the New Arrival.)

YES, stranger, I hev trailed the West
Since I wuz a kid on a bob-tailed nag,
I hev known the old land at its best,
An' packed most ev'ry kind of jag;
I hev rode fer life frum a prairie fire,
An' tramped fer life through a snow blockade;
I hev crumpled "bad men" by the quire,
But only once hev I been afraid.

I hev lain alone while the red-men crep'
Aroun' me in their fightin'-paint;
I have soothed the widow while she wep'
Because I'd made her man a saint;
I hev lassooed lobsters frum the East,
Till ev'ry j'int in their system shook,
An' I'd never run frum man or beast
Until I run frum a chinook.

The chinook had his lair in Crow's Nest Pass,
An' he foraged aroun' the Porcupine Hills,
But he'd loafed so long that the ranchin' grass
Had a wool-white cover frum the chills;

Songs of the Prairie

An' me, like a chap that wuz not afraid
Of anything with hide an' hair,
Went out in a sleigh to the hills an' stayed
Till the old chinook might find me there.

At last, when I thought I had tempted fate
Enough fer a man with a past like mine,
I hitched the bronks an' struck a gait
Along the slopes of the Porcupine;
An' the day wuz as cold as the Polar Sea,
With a nip as keen as a she-wolf fang;
But frost wuz just like food to me,
An' boldly over the fields I sang:

*"I am the man frum the Hole in the Hills,
Where the Great G. Whiliken capers 'round;
I am the gent that pays the bills
When they plant a greenhorn in the ground;
I am the Finish of folks that think
They can run a bluff on the prairie-bred,
Fer I give their vitals a fatal kink
When I open up with a shower of lead."*

An' the cold bit into my nose an' chin,
An' drilled itself to the marrow-bone;
My face wuz drawn in a frozen grin,
An' my fingers rattled like lumps of stone;

Songs of the Prairie

But my heart wuz as brave as an outlaw stag,
An' I laughed though the frost cut like a knife;
Till sudden I felt the hind bob drag,
An' I kew I wuz in fer a race fer life.

Out from his lair the sly chinook
Had hunted me with his fatal breath;
I dared not turn aroun' to look,
Fer to strand on the hillside there wuz death;
The hot wind sizzled along my back,
An' the sweat stood out on my shoulder-blade,
So I yelled at the team through the frozen crack
The roll of the tongue in my mouth had
made—

“Get out o’ here; by the Polar Star,
The fiend of the South is on your heels!”
An' I felt the old sleigh cringe an' jar,
An' fer once I prayed—fer a pair o' wheels;
But the sleigh stood still as the hind bob stuck
In mud that rolled to the bolster-rail;
So I slipped the tongue an' cursed my luck
As I straddled a bronk an' hit the trail.

Well, we beat it out by half a neck,
But the broncho's tail was scorched a sight,
An' I wuz a blistered, parboiled wreck,
An' nearly dead o' heat an' fright;

Songs of the Prairie

An' I squatted down in a shady spot
An' fanned myself with a wisp o' hay,
An' the boys on the lower ranches thought
They heard a voice in the chinook say :

*"I am the dope that was made to feed,
To fresh down-Easters just come out;
They'll swallow it all in their greenhorn greed,
An' send it home, beyond a doubt;
I am the caricature an' bluff
That is part of the play of the Western
men"—*

What's that? You say you've had enough?
Well, pass it on to your neighbor, then.

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